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## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF SAN BUENAVENTURA

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION POLICY & PLAN

VOLUME II

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF SAN BUENAVENTURA


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## INTRODUCTION

### DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF SAN BUENAVENTURA

Ventura County and the City of San Buenaventura have contributed important pages to California history. Daily events contribute to the ever-changing historical record. Knowledge of the City's history makes people aware that they can have an impact on their community's history and development.

Recalling historical events identifies a community's uniqueness and creates a sense of common pride. People who become excited about the community's past may also participate in efforts to plan the community's future--that is, a positive goal for any city to realize.

Brief historical reports important to the City are scattered throughout City and County files, the libraries, and the museum archives. Nowhere is there one short, complete narrative of San Buenaventura's history. The following integrates the developmental history of the City with that of California and the Nation. It is important to understand this City's history before one can appreciate our remaining historical resources which tell our story.



## I - CHUMASH PERIOD

The Indians who occupied the Channel Islands of Southern California in the neighboring coast of what is now Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, were among the most numerous, resourceful, and culturally advanced of the California Indians. When Cabrillo first made contact with them in 1542, he observed them as a large village directly on the beach; this was Shisholop, renamed Pueblo de Las Canoas by the Cabrillo party.<sup>1</sup> The village was located at Figueroa and the Promenade.

One of their special attainments and one of the reasons for their continuing capacity to survive was their ability to build frameless plank canoes and their fishing technology. "This, of course, was vital to their success as fishermen, but their equipment in the form of sinkers, hooks, harpoons and lines was also essential and displayed a high degree of ingenuity in adapting available materials to specialized purposes."<sup>2</sup>





## II - THE MISSION YEARS

Mission San Buenaventura was originally planned by Father Junipero Serra to be an intermediate mission between San Diego and Carmel. It was scheduled to be the ninth mission founded; it became the last of the California missions built by Serra. It was on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1782, that the Mission San Buenaventura was dedicated in "solemn ceremonies conducted by Serra and assisted by Father Pedro Campion."<sup>3</sup> Prior to construction of the Mission building, the Fathers established a chapel at the San Miguel site (Palm and Thompson) in 1782 which was used through 1816.

The mission became the dominating feature of the region. Later the town grew up around it. The mission was located on El Camino Real, so it was in the path of traveling priests, officials, rancheros, merchants, traders and finally settlers. Few travelers in early California history failed to visit it. "It drew much comment from visitors beginning with that of the English navigator, Captain George Vancouver, who reported a most agreeable day spent there in November of 1793, 'viewing the building of the mission, the arrangement of the gardens and cultivated land in its immediate vicinity.'"<sup>4</sup>

Mission San Buenaventura was third in meeting annual food crop and quantity per person and yet the estimated daily intake per person amounted to 1,840 calories, thus the Indians probably lived on the verge of clinical deficiency.<sup>5</sup> In opposition to the policy of the missions, about ten percent of the Indians' diet was based upon their ancestral subsistence patterns.<sup>6</sup> The Indians were encouraged by the padres to grow their own pumpkins, watermelons, muskmelons, maize and potatoes in gardens along the Ventura River, and contributing wild seeds and fruits<sup>7</sup> and in fishing for swordfish in waters which were identified as the submarine canyon by Hueneme.<sup>8</sup>

During this mission period there were two large land grants made. The first was Rancho Simi in 1795 by Governor Borica to the three Pico brothers, Patricio, Javier, and Miguel, the last two being soldiers of the Santa Barbara Company. In 1822, their interests were sold to Jose de La Guerra y Noriega of Santa Barbara. This rancho was one of California's largest containing, by a later United States survey, over 113,000 acres. The other Spanish period rancho was El Conejo, which adjoins Simi on the southwest and went through concession of Governor Borcia in 1802-3 to Ygnacio Rodriguez and Jose Polanco. Later Jose de La Guerra y Noriega bought partial ownership of El Conejo, the total area of which was 48,671 acres. For 80 years the Spanish and Mexican governments ruled the community.

### III - THE RISE OF THE RANCHOS

The rise of the ranches began in the 1830's when vast areas of the valley and coastal lands, no longer under jurisdiction of Mission San Buenaventura, were given by the Mexican government to applicants.

Before the end of the Mexican period, about 1822, there were nineteen land grants in the Ventura County area, most of them many thousands of acres, and including the 1846 grant of the former Mission lands to Jose Arnez. The river rich coastal lands and the expansive and grassy areas of the Conejo and Simi Valley, coupled with the Santa Clara River, Ventura River Valley and Ojai Valley saw a full blossoming of a pastoral cattle kingdom.

With the Mexican takeover of California came the Act of Secularization, that is, the transfer to secular administration of the Mission. Transfer at Mission San Buenaventura was in 1836, two years after the Secularization Decree, with Carlos Carillo named as the first administrator. Carillo was soon followed by Rafael Gonzalez, who according to Father Zephyrin Engelhardt, a church historian, "managed the



temporal affairs of the Mission satisfactorily, one of the few administrators of whom that could be said." The mission system as a whole was doomed long before secularization by causes external to its own immediate or local economic problems. Originally intended to fortify a boundary, populate a frontier, supply goods and men for the military, and raise the flag over tax paying citizens, the missions no longer had political value after the collapse of the Bourbon system of Charles III.<sup>9</sup> The decline of Mission San Buenaventura was even more pronounced than that of neighboring Santa Barbara.<sup>10</sup> The total Indian population had decreased from a high in 1816 of 1,328 to 626 in 1834, and by 1842, only 300 remained.<sup>11</sup> Certainly the introduction of new diseases was a major cause of the decline in Indian population. In 1811, Father Senan reported that the dominant illnesses were syphilis, tuberculosis, and dysentery,<sup>12</sup> and he requisitioned a medication for treatment of syphilis in 1817.<sup>13</sup> An epidemic of measles killed many adults and children during the winter of 1827-1828.<sup>14</sup> In regard to broader social issues, such as "spacial restriction, and social regulations, and value systems, the two cultures were irreconcilable. The ultimate response of the Indian was flight and death."<sup>15</sup>

#### IV - CALIFORNIA BECOMES PART OF THE UNITED STATES

As a result of the Mexican-American war in 1846, California was ceded to the United States and the character of Ventura along with the rest of the state began a profound change. Four years later on February 18, 1850, the first California State Legislature met in San Jose and divided the land into 27 counties. Ventura was included within Santa Barbara County,

When the land that today makes up Ventura County became part of the United States, part of it was privately claimed land (ranchos and mission-controlled areas) and part belonged to the public domain. Most of the mountain lands were in the public domain. Segregation of privately claimed land from public domain was the task of the Board of Land Commissioners which was created by Congress under an Act on March 3, 1851.

As far as Ventura County was concerned, following government approval of title and after official survey of the land, individual patents were issued by the United States to each owner of a rancho or land grant. The Mission San Buenaventura was awarded to Bishop Alemany, representing the church, along with the cemetery and garden grounds. The great land holdings of the Mission, granted after secularization to Jose Arnez by Governor Pio Pico, were acquired later as Rancho Ex-Mission San Buenaventura, by Dr. M. A. R. de Poli. Dr. Poli, a native of Spain, was the first practicing physician in Ventura. "Historians and lawyers say the title to the land passed so often and was divided so frequently that the property confusion in the years following 1850 kept San Buenaventura from becoming the great metropolis that Los Angeles is today."<sup>16</sup> For example, the ex-Mission lands between the church and Valdez Alley had transferred title about eighteen times by 1865.<sup>17</sup>

On July 8, 1856, a traveling artist named Henry Miller wrote of his approach to San Buenaventura:

"I left the sea beach, striking into a fine and green County...where I saw in the distance the belfry of San Buenaventura Mission. Finding plenty of grass, I resolved to spend the night here...I left in the morning, pursuing my way towards the Mission...and when I arrived after crossing the San Buenaventura I found it to be quite a village of about seventy or eighty houses. The Mission orchard is still in fine condition, planted with several hundred large pear trees, loaded with fruit...I dismounted at a hotel kept by a man of old Spain, and where quite a number of jovial men congregated... After breakfast, I took a sketch of the Mission."<sup>18</sup>

Ventura, along with Northern California cow counties, experienced a surge of new wealth that was generated by the gold rush. The value of cattle rose because of the need for beef by the mining camps and the new emigrants. In 1846 there was about 400,000 head in Alta, California, worth about \$4.00 a head. At the end of 1849 the price jumped to \$500 a head in Sacramento, and for years after it would remain more than \$50.00.<sup>19</sup> By 1860 the number of cattle in the state was more than three million.

The 1860's were a period in which the old time rancheros began to mix with the slowly incoming Americans. "A few settlers were coming in from the northern part of the state and from eastern states, and the old Spanish California influence was yielding to American."<sup>20</sup>

The year 1861-62 was the big wet year when the murky swirling Ventura River carried away part of the Ortega Adobe and stretched in width from the hills to Palm Street.<sup>21</sup> Sides of mountains slipped down from the hills at the west end of town and shaped the bluffs that exist today above the Avenue.



Following the wet year came two long years of drought from 1862 to 1864, that practically wiped out Southern California's cattle industry. Three successful dry seasons left the land so parched that in spring no new grass appeared. Literally thousands of cattle gathered around the dry water holes and cienegas only to die of thirst. In Ventura County alone more than 100,000 cattle and horses died. The day of the land barons and the absolute control of the Californians was at an end. The value of grazing lands fell so low that many of the great ranchos sold their lands for as little as ten cents an acre. Ranchos in Santa Clara, San Buenaventura and Ojai valleys passed into the hands of eastern capitalists who had heard reports of petroleum deposits. Real settlement came in 1867 with the subdivision of the Santa Paula y Saticoy holdings of George C. Briggs into small farms. In 1865 Thomas Bard described San Buenaventura as a "collection of one-story houses around the Mission."<sup>22</sup> He went on to say that the population is comprised of ten or twelve Americans and that the remainder were native Californians.<sup>23</sup> This is perhaps an incorrect estimate as Thompson and West list twenty-one Americans in the precinct by 1862.<sup>24</sup> The town that grew around the Mission was incorporated and approved by the legislature on April 1, 1866. At this point the town contained about one square mile according to a survey made the preceding November by W. H. Norway, civil engineer.

In 1873 Ventura County was formed out of the southeasterly portion of Santa Barbara County. The name Ventura was used although the county seat was San Buenaventura. Two islands, Anacapa and San Nicholas, were included in the new county. The first local elections to determine the local government were held February 25, 1873.

The formation of Ventura County brought many changes to its county seat. The courthouse was built in 1873 on Santa Clara Street near Figueroa. The first wharf was completed. The Bank of Italy was

started in 1875, the predecessor of the Bank of America. A public library was started, the school system was developing although the first high school was not built until 1890. A newspaper, the Ventura Signal, was started in 1871. The town had a water system, a band and a fire department.

San Buenaventura still retained many of her earlier features: "Its calaboose or jail, where early punishment included stocks and whippings, its bull ring for watered down bullfights, constructed wherever wanted by fencing off part of Main Street near the Mission, its wine and aguradiante shops, the general stores, back room barrel of whiskey--American introduced--free for customers; and the magnificently muddy, dusty, lumpy streets."<sup>25</sup>

Inevitably, the growth of the community led to the demand for the usual businesses, merchandise enterprises, pressuring change in the nature of the structures along Main Street adjacent to the Mission. By 1875 Ventura was described as:

"It was formerly a Spanish village, adobe built, ruinous, filthy, and otherwise well calculated to gladden the heart of its swarthy denizens. It has long since shaken off that lethargy which it enjoyed by right of birth, and, though many traces of its castilian origin yet linger about its suburbs, has developed into the brisk, stirring, galloping life of an enterprising American city."<sup>26</sup>

During the late '60's and early '70's commercial establishments began to appear in what had been primarily a residential area. Thomas Bard described early Main Street west of the Mission as the place of "homes and drinking places" and that all "the people of the tiny village live down Main Street."<sup>27</sup> H. Cohen became one of the earliest merchants when he opened a general merchandise store in an adobe 24 feet east of Valdez Alley in 1869. After his death in 1874, his wife Esther continued

to operate the store out of her residence until her own death in 1905. The inventory records and accounts of this store filed with the probate court in 1874 list everything from Hostetter's Bidders to buttons, tools, toys, and household goods. "It is noteworthy that although many familiar Hispanic and Anglo names are present in the Cohen accounts, there was not a single identifiable Indian or Chinese name."<sup>28</sup>

Properties changed hands in even smaller parcels and what had first been residential adobes were themselves split into multiple dwellings or converted into business use. Examples of this incredible transfer of property are listed briefly below.

The Camarillo Adobe was built near Ventura Avenue in 1867. The first schoolhouse was built in 1869. In the late 1800's and early 1900's it was a restaurant, became part of Chinatown in 1905, and was demolished in 1920 in favor of a service station.<sup>29</sup> In what is today's Mission archaeological site, Dr. Cephas L. Bard opened the County's first drugstore in 1869 in what had been either a framehouse<sup>30</sup> or an adobe.<sup>31</sup> In 1886 Mr. Righetti replaced it with a brick building divided by a partition, one side was a saloon and the other a grocery store.<sup>32</sup> By the 1920's this building was converted into a steam laundry and was demolished in 1974. The Escandon Adobe was built between 1855 to 1860. By 1886 it was converted into tenements, between 1892-1911 it housed the Wing High Laundry and was torn down in the 1920's<sup>33</sup> to be replaced by a variety of auto service businesses. The Sanchez Adobe was built about 1845, came to house the French Laundry and the Tim Kee Japanese Goods Store by 1892, and was also demolished for auto shops in the 1920's, today it is beneath the parking lot of the Holy Cross School. The Valdez Adobe, west of Valdez Alley, was built around 1820.<sup>34</sup> As the second house in Ventura,<sup>35</sup> the home belonged to descendants of one of the original Mission garrison soldiers whose son, Eugenio, was the first child to be baptized at the Mission in 1782. Ramon Valdez sold the property to Peter Constanzia in 1857. Constanzia regularly held an open house with a banquet and dancing



interrupted for a recess so that all could attend midnight mass. He also managed a livery stable and stagecoach stop in the barn on this lot. After the turn of the century it changed hands many times. It lost part of its facade in a widening of Main Street, and ended its days as Leo's Spanish Kitchen and finally El Adobe Viejo Restaurant. It was demolished in 1951 for a used car lot.<sup>37</sup>

Following the 1870's Main Street rapidly became the commercial center of Ventura. A description of Ventura County, published by the Ventura Development Association circa 1888 described the street as:

"The business of the town is transacted on Main Street, which extends east and west, parallel with the ocean. There are thirteen groceries and general merchandise houses, three drugstores, four dry goods stores, two paint shops, two banks, two jewelry stores, four livery stables, law and real estate offices and several hotels."<sup>38</sup>

With the completion of the Southern Pacific railroad from Santa Barbara to San Buenaventura in 1887, a real estate boom was started that swept Southern California. Ventura's population doubled from 1,500 in 1887 to 3,000 in 1890. Throughout Ventura County there was selling, buying and building. Two new hotels were built, the Rose and the Anacapa. The town's first theater was constructed in 1891. The first and only streetcar was built. It was a version of the trolley--only horse-drawn. Montalvo was laid out at this period.

The push to the southeast or the Avenue area was begun even before 1900. Palm trees, some of which stand along the streets, were planted during the 1880's. There were new business buildings on both sides of Main Street from Ventura Avenue to California Street, many of them built of brick. Many new homes were built between 1880-1900. One of the finest was the Schiappa-Pietra home on the northeast corner of Santa Clara and Figueroa Streets. It took up a quarter of a block. During the 1860's these two Italian brothers had bought the 1,400-acre

Rancho Del Norte from the Sanchez heirs. The house had imported marble stairways. There were also two Victorian-style homes built on Oak Street between Santa Clara and Meta in the middle of the block on the east side. One was the home of Dr. Cunane on Santa Clara Street between Chestnut and Ash Streets, on the south side west of the Charles Bartlett home. Lining the north side of Main to the Mission was a number of adobes which originally had been homes; plastered inside and out, they were used for other purposes.<sup>40</sup> One was a Chinese laundry, another prepared Spanish foods.

A building of importance on the south side of Main was the Santa Clara house. It was a little west of the Mission. The Santa Clara house was a two-story building with a porch facing the street the full length of the building. Above on the second floor was a matching balcony. The first floor was used for the lobby, dining room and kitchen and on the second floor were the bedrooms. Between the Anacapa Hotel and the Mission on the north side was the Armory Hall built for the Ventura Militia Company in the 1890's." On the southwest corner of Ventura Avenue and Main Street was the Feraud Store in a large building, the Feraud's well known sourdough French bread produced in their own bakery. Across the street was the Camarillo Adobe. In the early 1900's, it was the last or first chance saloon, depending on whether a person was coming into town or leaving.

By 1910 the population of Ventura had climbed to 5,000 inhabitants. By 1912 the streets were paved and the last of the old wooden sidewalks had been replaced by cement. The County Courthouse at the head of California Street was opened in 1913 after a controversial campaign by Oxnard to have it built in that town.

Some indications of the decline in Indian population, the arrival of the Chinese, and general growth of Ventura City and County are indicated in the statistical records. The 1800 Census for the City showed

722 Indians, which decreased to 300 by 1842. The Chinese were first recorded in 1875 at 200 persons, but by 1905, their numbers decreased to 110.<sup>42</sup>

Precise figures for Chinese population could not be determined without research into the primary data of census household packets, but it is likely that the trend locally followed the pattern of the state as a whole. For California, immigration peaked in the 1871-1880 decade,<sup>44</sup> and resident population of overseas Chinese actually declined between 1881-1890.<sup>45</sup>

#### V - THE CHINESE IN VENTURA: 1866-1928

The Chinese in Ventura: 1866-1928. The first incentive for massive immigration of Chinese to California was the 1849 gold rush.<sup>46</sup> The exact date of the arrival of the first Chinese in California is not definitely known since census figures did not identify ethnic groups until later. Although the lure of gold may have been one motive for immigration, the political and economic conditions in mainland China cannot be overlooked, since 1830's through the 1840's brought suffering to the Chinese people from a series of wars, famines, pestilence and economic depression.<sup>47</sup>

The opium war between China and Great Britain that ended in 1842 opened many Chinese ports to foreign trade. The ending of Chinese long term isolation provided a link to both Great Britain and to the United States. The treaty of Hwangsia in 1844 permitted exchange between the U.S. and China. "Both internal and external forces were effective in inducing a poor and threatened populace into leaving their homeland in search of purported prosperity."<sup>48</sup> One such external force was the news of Marshall's discovery of gold. Shipmasters capitalized on the great excitement by distributing maps, placards, and pamphlets concerning the "golden hills."<sup>49</sup> The political upheavals coupled with the economic depression of China and the lure of

prosperity in America sent waves of Chinese to the United States. At first, due to the labor shortage during the gold rush, these new immigrants were viewed as a godsend. Between the years of 1850 to 1870 thousands of Chinese flocked to many towns and cities in California where they found jobs working on the railroads, in mines and as farm laborers. During the next thirty years a dynamic form of interaction between the predominantly Anglo-American culture and the Chinese culture existed with segregation and discrimination culminating with the Chinese Exclusion Act and Garry Act that ended the era of immigration.

In Ventura the Chinese came to work as general laborers, settled on Figueroa Street between Main and Santa Clara Streets prior to 1866, and established their own exclusive settlement known as Chinatown. The earliest primary reference located was in a letter of Thomas Bard's which referred to the Chinese as "Tartars" in a description of the July 4, 1866 celebration. The exact date of the establishment of Ventura's Chinatown is not known, but early photographs show that by the 1870's Chinatown was quite developed on the east side of Figueroa Street, with the west side of Figueroa Street developed by 1890.<sup>50</sup>

The creation of this or any Chinatown cannot be viewed wholly as an outcome of white racism any more than its creation could have been caused entirely by the congregative sentiments of the Chinese.<sup>51</sup> Instead, this ethnic ghetto-like creation can be considered as the culmination of two elements acting simultaneously. A powerful sense of group feeling and many social needs found institutionalized expression in Chinatown at the same time that white aversion and hostility gave added reasons for those Chinese institutions to continue to flourish.<sup>52</sup>

The Chinese immigrant of the 1850's through the 1870's did not come to the United States to establish a permanent home, but rather to accumulate money and to return to China. Due to the seasonal character of



many of their occupations, a transient population was created. Since the Chinese did not want to build permanent homes in America, they also did not aspire to establish lasting and meaningful personal contact or to emulate American values. Instead, Chinatown reflected the values and institutions of a people who came for economic gains and to stay only as long as necessary. The attitude of the white society reflected the feelings of a people who are introduced to a new and foreign element which lived in semi-isolation and did not want to adjust to or participate in the "American dream."<sup>53</sup> In turn these feelings translated into ambivalence, disdain, hostility and even hatred.

In Ventura the Chinese were at first welcome as workers in construction, industrial and agricultural projects. "A brigade of celestials" worked on the canal bringing water to Ventura in 1871,<sup>54</sup> and "Jim Chinaman" husked corn in 1882.<sup>55</sup> For the most part, they lived alone within their own isolated community, saving money for the return trip to China. Some remained and carried on flourishing businesses, some remained too poor to return, and many acquired the funds to return to their homeland and family. Sing Kee, an early restaurant owner in Ventura, achieved this security and left in the 1890's to return to China.<sup>56</sup>

By 1876, there were at least 200 Chinese living mostly along Figueroa Street between Main and Santa Clara Street.<sup>57</sup> In 1873, the Ventura Signal reported a disturbance among the Chinese in their quarters on Main Street.<sup>58</sup> Two years later the same paper complained about the washhouses and houses of ill fame on Main Street, "the slop from these houses is liable to breed a pestilence...we trust that the law declaring all Chinese wash in slophouses a nuisance may be rigidly executed. If so, there will be no resort to violent measures."<sup>59</sup>

The Municipal Fire Company was established in 1876. Not to be outdone, the 200-odd residents of the local Chinatown organized a hose company of their own, built or bought a two-wheel horsecart, 100 feet of hose, and were in business. A photograph taken of the July 4, 1876, parade shows twelve Chinese smoke eaters attired in umbrella shaped straw hats, blue trousers and smocks.<sup>60</sup> The Chinese company was active for at least thirty years and was often mentioned as being first on the scene. The fire that threatened Justice L. F. Eastman's office in 1903 was put out by the Chinese before the Municipal Fire Department had arrived.<sup>61</sup>

In the 1860's and after the passage of the California mining laws which prohibited Chinese labor in the gold fields, the Chinese moved into a variety of jobs some of which were railroad construction, food, laundry, manufacturing, merchandising, domestic services and agriculture.<sup>62</sup> The labor unions retaliated to this competition by the formation of the Anti-Chinese Union. The increasing hostility and discrimination reached its peak with the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1888 Scott Act and the 1892 Gary Act. In turn, these acts were reflected in Ventura by the efforts to remove the Chinese or to tax them out of existence. Action taken to remove the Chinese was cheered as civic duty:

"Messrs. Blackburn, Rigger and Brooks have moved the last of the Chinese wash houses off Main and Figueroa Streets...the gentlemen, with a laudible spirit of enterprise, cleaned them all out. They deserve the thanks of the entire community."<sup>63</sup>

However, either the report was wrong or exaggerated. An 1884 photograph<sup>64</sup> shows Chinese dwellings on the east side of Figueroa. The Signal reported efforts to tax each wash house and laundry at \$15 per quarter, later reduced to \$5.00.<sup>65</sup> Another article that revealed the community's attitude stated: "It is far better to keep the filthy heathen (the Chinese) together where their dirt can be disposed of in

bulk rather than to scatter it through the resident portions of the town.<sup>66</sup> Regardless of the increasing pressures between 1884 and 1890, Chinatown continued to expand to the west side of Figueroa on property owned by Sing Hing near the corner of Santa Clara and by A. Ayers near the corner of Main Street.

By 1890 at least ten structures belonged to Chinatown on Figueroa Street. Sanborn maps of 1892 locate about eleven separate street addresses that can be attributed to Chinatown on the east side of Figueroa Street and seventeen dwellings with separate addresses on the west side of Figueroa Street behind land owned by N. Peirano, D. J. Righetti, and F. Hartman on East Main.<sup>67</sup>

Again and again, the papers report anti-Chinese sentiments. The Signal wrote concerning the anti-Chinese League meeting of January 8, 1885, "It is not fair that white laboring men and women cannot gain employment instead of the Chinese." In 1886 the Signal again reports of another anti-Chinese meeting at Union Hall.<sup>68</sup>

The Vidette displays an ad which claims, "We have all kinds of fresh bakery goods...no Chinese employees."<sup>69</sup> From 1891 through 1905 the papers deal directly with the Chinese problem, "the Gary Law, Chinese immigration and registration, and Chinese deportation." Still, Chinatown survived until 1905 to 1906.

In 1905 the Chinese population in Ventura was 110, and the Chinese inspector made some remarks that would spell the future for Ventura's Chinese population:

...Here, as everywhere else in the south, the Chinese population is decreasing. Since the last census was taken, the Chinese in this section have decreased at least fifty percent. As a reason for this, Mr. Walker thinks that the Chinese, after getting

enough money, go home never to return. Many of them are dying off and there is no new generation to take their places. Then, too, they are leaving the Pacific coast for other sections of the country.<sup>70</sup>

At the turn of the century, Ventura mirrored the rest of the nation in its growing demand for municipal modernization, development, cleanup and civic improvements. Civil improvements include the extension of the sewer system on Main Street in 1903 and up Valdez Alley in 1907, erection of a new post office, building of the Peirano-Rigaletti block on Main Street,<sup>71</sup> paving of Main Street and installation of sidewalks. Chinatown began to feel the pressure. "R. E. Brakey is busy transplanting the east side of Chinatown, and two buildings were moved yesterday to be anchored back of the remodeled adobe on Main Street, near the Avenue."<sup>72</sup> By 1906 the Chinese had been forced to relocate to Main Street near Ventura Avenue on property owned by George Mon Lai and Harry Bock and family. There were only four structures left in the original Chinatown area on East Figueroa. The reason that part of Chinatown remained on East Figueroa was that the land was owned by a Chinese merchant, while all the rest of the land had been owned by white citizens.

The opening of the sugarbeet factory in 1903 in Oxnard drew many of Ventura's Chinese to seek employment. Records of the Oxnard Chinatown confirm that its rise in population coincides with the late 1890's and early 1900's. "The consensus is that the employment situation was pretty bleak in Ventura and many Chinese moved away for economic reasons."<sup>73</sup>

On May 8, 1923, George Mon Lai and Harry Bock and family sold the property that contained Chinatown to J. C. Randall. The Sanborn maps of Main Street as of 1928 show an empty lot where Chinatown dwellings once stood.<sup>74</sup> Thus between 1923 and 1928 the structures were torn down. "Where the remaining Chinese went after that date is speculation. Other than the various possibilities that some scattered locally, some went to live in Oxnard, some died and some returned to China and other locales."<sup>75</sup>



## VI - 1900-1929: A TIME OF EXPANSION

By 1900 the downtown area (between Fir and Figueroa and Poli and Thompson) was the hub of the business community as well as the social center for most Venturans. Physically, with its hodgepodge of architectural styles it was much like any other western and midwestern main streets; yet it was a town in transition. By 1905, new technological inventions--the telephone and the automobile--heralded a new way of life. Yet, although progress was affecting the community, it was not until the 1920's, with the development of the Avenue oilfields, that the quiet, agricultural town of San Buenaventura exploded in a real estate and developmental boom. As a prominent builder expressed the real estate boom; "yesterday houses are going up like mushrooms and improvements are being made all over Ventura."<sup>76</sup>

Contrary to many other California towns, many of Ventura's original Spanish adobes still stood in the 1900's--dotting Main Street, sandwiched between new brick, wooden false fronts and box frame buildings. Unfortunately, these "modern buildings" were neither original nor well built. They were usually taken from mail order catalogs and then were constructed by local carpenters.<sup>77</sup> Ventura was similar in appearance to many growing towns--there was congestion everywhere along the main streets. Businesses were competing for customers advertising specials on posters tacked all over town. By 1905 the forces of modernization had changed much of city life. Stores with ready-made items and auto-related businesses replaced skilled craftsmen of earlier times.

In August, 1903, City Ordinance No. 130 outlawed the sale of liquor and thus many of the saloons became soft drink parlors and cigar stores.<sup>78</sup> This changed the character of the downtown noticeably. While it retained the commercial stores and hotels, the downtown no longer generated the same sort of street life as in the days of saloons. In fact, as the century progressed, automobiles overtook the horse and bicycle as the most popular means of transportation. By 1916, eleven auto-related businesses thrived in the downtown area.<sup>79</sup>

During the first World War, 1917-1919, the passenger automobiles were called upon to fill the vacuum caused by the lack of railroads accessible for public use. Since freight transportation was a war emergency priority, "motor cars took the place of railroads during the war, and the railroads discovered afterwards that the automobiles would decidedly retain it."<sup>80</sup> The automobile business boomed after the war as consumers splurged with the purchase of a new automobile. By 1921 there were forty-eight auto-related businesses in Ventura.<sup>81</sup>

Probably, more than any other, the oil industry was responsible for the development of Ventura. Although Ventura's first oil well was drilled in 1865; "the discovery and development of the Ventura Avenue oilfield was the development that made the old mission town of San Buenaventura a city, trebling its population in five years and starting it on a career of growth that will make it an industrial center, a seaport and one of the leading resort towns of the resort paradise of the world."<sup>83</sup>

Ventura in the 1920's had paved streets and a sewage system sixteen miles in length; although sewage then emptied into the Pacific Ocean, bonds were raised to provide a septic tank by 1921.<sup>84</sup> The City was supplied with water and electricity by the Southern California Edison Company. The electric power was transmitted from hydro-electric plants located on the Kern River and Big Creek.

There were two sources of gas supply, one was natural gas from the oilfields three miles north of Ventura, and the other was the south mountain field fifteen miles east of the City. Building permits illustrate the growth of Ventura. In 1914, the value was \$46,770. In 1926, the value was \$2,359,318.<sup>85</sup>

By 1895 there were 47 producing wells in Ventura, with a total output of 4,290 barrels. In 1900 W. L. Watts of the State Mining Bureau, counted 267 wells in Ventura County, yielding about 300,000 barrels

per month.<sup>86</sup> In 1915 Ralph B. Lloyd of Ventura, invited veteran oil man, Joseph B. Dabney, to Ventura and succeeded in convincing him that there was oil in the Avenue area. On January 20, 1914 Lloyd No. 1 was drilled to 2,558 feet; unfortunately, the well went wild, wrecking the casing and ruining the chances of making a producer out of it. Lloyd No. 2 was then started, about 500 feet north of Lloyd No. 1. This well, along with Lloyd No. 3, was wrecked by underground gas pressure.

In 1916 the Shell Company of California leased from the Lloyd Company about 15,000 acres. After three frustrating years of work, Shell abandoned part of the field. The General Petroleum Company then procured leases controlling fifty acres in 1917. "After an expenditure of about one million dollars and three years of work, it was in the same place as the Shell Company, their efforts being defeated by the great gas pressure."<sup>87</sup>

In 1920 the Associated Oil Company bought the lease for the Ventura field. By October, 1922, the Association succeeded in drilling Lloyd No. 5 to a depth of 4,050 feet, at which point it came in with a production of about 2,000 barrels per day. About this time the Shell Company succeeded in bringing in Gosnell No. 3, with a production of 900 barrels per day.

In 1925, the real discoveries that "put the Ventura field on the map were made in the Associated Oil Company's Lloyd No. 9 and Lloyd No. 16."<sup>88</sup> These two wells came in January and February, 1925, one producing 15,000 cubic feet of gas per day, and the other about 4,000,000; and about 4,000 or 5,000 barrels of oil per day each.

Bootlegging was big business in the 1920's and California, with its thousand miles of coastline, was a bootlegger's paradise. Sally Stanford, who later became a famous madame in San Francisco, ran a one-woman bootlegging business in Ventura. Five gallons of alcohol cost \$25. This then had to be cut, flavored with bourbon extract,

colored with caramel, bottled and labeled, then aged. "I used to age mine about forty-eight hours."<sup>89</sup> Ms. Stanford, along with many of the area's other bootleggers, bought raw materials from a place called The Rincon, which "was very popular with people in my business."<sup>90</sup> The reason for the popularity was because the County line ran right through the middle of the house. When the Santa Barbara County police arrived, everyone would run over to the Ventura side of the house "thus wouldn't get pinched."<sup>91</sup> It was the same when the Ventura County police dropped by. According to Ms. Stanford, the two county police departments never arrived at the same time.

Throughout the 1910 and 1930 papers are examples of citizens being arrested and fined for possession and sale of intoxicating beverages. "W. P. Cecil, 53, a local taxi driver, and Stanley L. Shellbarger, 23, rig builder, were arraigned before Judge B. L. Oregg at 2:00 p.m. today on charges of liquor possession. This was Mr. Cecil's third arrest, and he was fined \$500."<sup>92</sup> Two days later Mrs. Inez Garcia pleaded guilty to possession of a still.<sup>93</sup>

The 1920's real estate boom caused by the oilfields and the building of better roads connecting Ventura to Los Angeles and other surrounding towns resulted in a tremendous building activity. Many of these new buildings were built in the Hispanic style that had become famous at the San Diego exposition in 1915. Many buildings along Main Street were either built in this new style or were renovated to appear Hispanic. Today's El Jardin Patio, the Ventura Inn, 487 East Main Street, and Thrifty's, 467 East Main Street, are representative of buildings built during this period.<sup>94</sup> The Dreamweaver, 443 East Main Street, is an example of a renovated building. Built in 1880, it was given an Hispanic face lift in 1926.<sup>95</sup>

The beach communities got their glamorous names during the boomtime '20's. "The Sheik," starring Rudolph Valentino, was filmed at Oxnard Beach, which was promptly renamed Hollywood Beach. The real estate



development named Hollywood-By-The-Sea and Silver Strand followed. Pierpont Beach at the foot of Seaward Avenue also became popular. At that time it had a broad, level stretch of sand and Pierpont was booming. The automobile was coming into its own with new roads such as the 101 alternate route along the coast under construction. It was completed in 1930, making the beaches more accessible.

The real estate boom of the '20's fizzled out in the wake of the great Depression. Many Los Angeles buyers found that the beach lots they had paid good prices for were now worth nothing. Big storms and waves washed out a new beach highway between Pierpont and Hueneme in the early '30's. The Pierpont Pier, the Promenade, and several small apartment houses were washed away. Pierpont Bay went into a decline from which it did not recover until the redevelopment of the 1960's.

By the end of the 1920's, California was closely tied to the national economy, and many of the commodities that Ventura had to offer the national market were vulnerable to recession.<sup>96</sup> The produce it supplied, walnuts, lemons and oranges, was considered a semi-staple, and the resort opportunities that it offered became obsolete for a nation of people seeking the necessities of life. Issues such as the legislative acts of the New Deal, the devaluation of the dollar, the third term controversy and the political turmoil across the oceans occupied the thoughts of the people almost to the exclusion of matters concerned merely with the city or the state.<sup>97</sup>

## VII - 1930-1945: DEPRESSION AND WAR

Although businesses survived in Ventura, it was still "tough going" during the thirties. Concerned citizens established the Poinsettia Post Auxiliary #339, which distributed clothes and shoes for 1,240 people from September through June, 1930-31. During that year, 1,132 adults and children were cared for. During the second year of operation, 1931-32, 535 families were outfitted, in clothing, including 465 adults and 776 children and 5,133 articles of clothing were distributed. The store was located at 456 East Main and was donated by John Lago-marsiano.<sup>98</sup> Mr. W. C. Hick, head of the County Welfare Department, reported to the Board of Supervisors that his department spent \$11,425 during the month of June for temporary and permanent aid to needy people.<sup>99</sup>

Ventura went through the same stages of response to the depression as did the rest of the country that started with Hoover's philosophy and ended with the onslaught of World War II. By 1930 the sheer number of impoverished and unemployed in America demanded some form of action. The Hoover administration tried to cope with the hard times by pronouncements of confidence in America. Its philosophy asked for relief to individuals to come from private sources or local governments, and only with reluctance did it move towards federally funded aid to help the unemployed.

Ventura greeted the new year of 1932 with some hopefulness, based on record bumper crops and a slight gain over the previous year's profit. The returns on walnuts, lemons, and oranges came to \$11,500,000, an increase of \$1,169,960.<sup>101</sup> Yet, while the farmers had some reason to rejoice, the plight of the unemployed grew worse.

The community clothing center at 63 North California Street, put out an urgent appeal for all kinds of bedding and a four-lid wood stove. The stove was for a family who could not afford to heat their house nor pay for electricity.<sup>102</sup> Ten days later they reported their shelves

were bare and that they had nothing to give the 100 needy people that came in daily. The Ventura County Hotel and Resort Proprietors, in an effort to trump up business, banded together in October, 1932 to promote through the newspapers' ads their businesses. In November, 1932 the Ventura Board of Supervisors voted to apply for \$200,000 federal funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. These funds were to be used in County welfare aid during the coming winter.

County Auditor, Kenneth Olivier, reported that there was but \$35,000 in relief money left to feed the unemployed until the end of the fiscal year, next July, and that at the present rate it would be entirely wiped out by February.<sup>103</sup> In his report he cited a total of 3,400 unemployed men in the Ventura County area alone.<sup>104</sup> Establishment of four relief camps for the unemployed in Ventura County was given official approval by the Board of Supervisors in November of 1932. Twenty percent of Ventura's single, unemployed men would be taken care of in two camps; two other camps would house married men with dependents. The men would earn three dollars a day for their labor on forest road work. The County Statistician, B. B. Jenkins, reported 3,519 jobless persons currently registered with his department.<sup>105</sup>

While the jobless were seeking any kind of work, marathon dances, flagpole sitting and sky dancing were big news. Betty and Benny Fox, a sister and brother team, sky danced aloft a 50-foot pole for 48½ hours above the Ventura Theater. When they finally descended, the whole town had congregated creating a terrific traffic jam.<sup>106</sup> While the City Council celebrated outlawing these kinds of "entertainment," the newspapers continued to cover them. An example was the marathon dance at the Green Mill Ballroom, located at about 300 West Main Street. The Star reported on October 7, 1932 that only seven couples were left out of the original eighteen and that they now had to dance for a solid hour before breaks whereas before it was forty-five minutes.

The banking crisis of 1933 greatly affected Ventura as well as the rest of the nation. In March, 1933 before President-elect Roosevelt was inaugurated, California Governor Rolph declared a state bank holiday. The Ventura Star reported on March 2, 1933: California's three-day bank holiday had little effect on business in Ventura. Residents generally were going about their affairs as usual, all stores and public offices were open and Ventura's three banks remained open.

Even though Roosevelt extended the holiday, Ventura merchants reported a better than normal business; considerably improved over the first two days of the bank holiday.<sup>109</sup> All the merchants were continuing the policy of accepting checks for the amount of purchase; although they could not cash customers' checks.<sup>110</sup> Five thousand dollars was paid out to nine hundred Ventura County men employed under the RFC (Reconstruction Finance Corporation) program. The payments were made possible under a plan worked out by the County Statistician, B. B. Jenkins, and Treasurer, Harry Van Delinder; in an effort to avoid a run on the County's Welfare Department by the hundreds of workers who would have no other means of obtaining food over the weekend.<sup>111</sup>

On March 10, the State Legislature scrapped its proposed banking legislation and started to work on the draft of a bill which was to be in full accord with the federal banking regulations issued by President Roosevelt. Five days later, Ventura's banks reopened. Displaying confidence in the soundness of the institutions and in the future of the County, state and nation, people in every village and city of Ventura County where banks are located swarmed to those institutions this morning to deposit cash and checks.<sup>112</sup> Coincident with the rush of depositors, businessmen in all parts of the County reported that business was just "like old times" as housewives once more did their shopping with apparent newborn confidence.<sup>113</sup>



In addition, the repeal of the 21st Amendment recharged life in Ventura, in April, 1933. Some form of prohibition had been in force in Ventura for approximately 30 years, and the first trainloads of beer were consumed in one day by thirsty Venturans.<sup>114</sup>

Despite the rumblings of war in Europe, by 1939, the City had "definitely moved back into its place in the business sun."<sup>118</sup> The City experienced its first million dollar building year since the boom days of 1929 and "heard reports of even bigger things to come in 1940."<sup>119</sup> Ventura expended \$4,307,187 to enlarge, modernize and beautify the schools. Fourteen new stores or office buildings were completed and occupied.

Main Street, according to the Ventura County Star Free Press, caught the:

"construction urge from builders of new homes, and continued to splurge on face lifts for their stores. Sparkling new or remodeled buildings give Ventura's main stem a far brighter appearance than it could boast at the close of last year."<sup>121</sup>

The single biggest construction project along Main Street during 1939 was the construction of the J. C. Penney Company building, located at 340 East Main Street, costing more than \$50,000. Employment picked up and the Avenue oilfields reported an increase of employment due to the European war and the demand for gasoline and oil.<sup>122</sup>

Yet, while optimism ran high, the possibility of the United States becoming involved in the European war loomed greater. Ironically, the involvement of the United States in the war, would bring the much desired prosperity to Ventura, as it did to the rest of the nation.

Within the Ventura County district existed many areas of national concern. There were, of course, highways, bridges, railroads and harbors, but more important were the oilfields. The gasoline and oil products that came from these fields would become nationally essential for the mobilization of the United States armed effort.

At the same time, Ventura County's Japanese published "pledges of wholehearted, unanimous loyalty to the American government and willingness to serve in the U.S. armed forces if called upon."<sup>125</sup>

On December 10, 1941, between the hours of 7:00 and 11:00, Ventura experienced its first blackout. Due to the coastal location of the City, a total blackout was essential for its safety. "City officials today called the blackout a success, commended participants for their cooperation."<sup>126</sup> Ventura's first blackout had been much more successful than some neighboring cities who reported lights still on in half the city two hours after the blackout.<sup>127</sup> The major offenders during Ventura's blackout were neon clocks and vault lights inside store buildings. According to the Chief of Police Neal, there were too many automobiles creeping through the business district. He warned that "hereafter only cars eligible for the street will be emergency vehicles with blue lights and proper designation."<sup>128</sup>

The businessmen met and announced that stores which had been observing 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. hours in the past will continue to observe these hours daily, including Saturday, from now until further notice.<sup>129</sup> Contrary to widespread belief, Ventura business thrived and by the end of month merchants reported that their businesses were booming.<sup>130</sup> Banks reported "steady non-inflationary increases in bank deposits during 1941."<sup>131</sup> The reason for the increases officials at the banks agreed, was the generally good price level maintained throughout the year for the County's farm crops. The building of new homes, 74 for the year, went on in spite of the threats of defense priority interference and rising prices. Yet, overall, building in Ventura dropped off in 1941, totals failed to approach the 1940 figure, largest since the Depression. Building authorities were at somewhat of a loss to explain the 1941 slump, but were inclined to blame the increasing war effort and encroachment of defense activities on private construction. Materials became harder to obtain promptly, if at all, prices went up; labor became scarce.

Due to the influx of soldiers, businesses in local restaurants, bars and stores increased. A concession to do all the drycleaning for Camp Cook, an army base, near Lompoc, was granted to the Paramount Cleaners of Ventura. The new army base planned to house 30,000 men. Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Huyette, Paramount proprietors, said "we are hopeful that it will resort in bringing a considerable amount of employment to Ventura."<sup>133</sup> This was the first of its kind of contract, before all businesses were allowed to solicit on base for customers. The Huyettes were considering renting a larger building to accommodate the overflow of business from Mr. John Lagomarsino, who had been influential in securing the contract for them with Camp Cook.<sup>134</sup>

Venturans rushed to establish special recreation for the soldiers that were located close by. In January 1942, they launched the "Adopt a Soldier Program." Basically, the plan called for families to "adopt" one or two soldiers, permitting them to use their showers and baths several times a week, inviting their "adopted sons" to dinner and to generally brighten their spirits.<sup>135</sup> Another organization known as the Three-V Girls was formed in April. This committee, Ventura Victory Volunteers, acted as partners for servicemen at community dances and parties. They staged bi-monthly dances and parties, and according to Mrs. Charles T. Butler, chairman of the committee, "the boys have asked for more."<sup>136</sup> The Booster Club also provided free services for the enlisted men. Producing a homey atmosphere at their Seaside Canteen location, they provided the men with cake and coffee, music, pool and eased the inevitable loneliness of many soldiers. In one week the ladies of the Booster Club served 28 pies and coffee through their canteen directed by Mrs. Edna Boswell.<sup>137</sup> One soldier wrote to the Ventura Weekly Post and Democrat, June 1942, "before the various clubs started, we walked the streets with nothing to do."

While patriotic Venturans were involved in helping servicemen, the area's Japanese were going through the trauma of losing their lands and relocation. A few days after Pearl Harbor, the Star Free Press reported that the 40 Japanese vegetable farmers found themselves at a



standstill. Their funds and businesses had been frozen by the U.S. District Attorney, Fleet Palmer.<sup>138</sup> The next day, Palmer announced that the area's Japanese farmers could temporarily continue to sell vegetables and produce. Agricultural Commissioner Romain Young urged "all Japanese alien farmers to take their produce to market."<sup>139</sup>

By February 1942, the County's feelings had intensified along with the nation's against the Japanese. The County Grand Jury met to study a resolution similar to one passed by the Board of Supervisors requesting federal authorities immediately "to take the necessary action to cause all Japanese, whether born in this country or not, to be removed a distance of at least 200 miles back from the shores of the Pacific."<sup>140</sup> Scores of County Japanese filled the courthouse on February 6, 1942, in a roundup by Sheriff Howard Durley and District Attorney M. Arthur Waite for questioning on their farm leases. Fourteen Ventura County Japanese families, most of them from the Oxnard-Port Hueneme harbor area, had been questioned by Waite and Durley by mid-afternoon. By March of 1942 the 672 Japanese of Ventura County were being evacuated to relocation centers. Officials of the Ventura Wartime Civil Control Center Administration, 53 South California Street, urged that prospective evacuees take advantage of their service in speeding property settlement.<sup>142</sup> The article further stated that "voluntary consultation by Japanese with WCCA service centers can not only greatly expedite the evacuation, but insure minimum loss of property to the individual."<sup>143</sup>

Before the war ended, hundreds of veterans were coming home to Ventura. The City's chief concern mirrored that of the rest of the nation--what to do with all the returned veterans? Businessmen were concerned that the unemployment problems of the Depression would return, thus bursting their wartime bubble of prosperity. Yet, the assessed valuation in Ventura County was the highest in history in 1945.



The oil industry had exploded along with the war. The increase in oil assessments occasioned by heavier production demanded by the war, and by new discoveries as a secondary factor, foreshadowed a decline in the future according to County Assessor Karl Dwire, who said that "the oil fields are diminishing assets."<sup>145</sup>

The news of the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Imperial Forces reached Ventura at approximately 3:00 Monday afternoon, August 14, 1945.

"Strains of the air raid sirens, heralding the official victory flash, snapped the tightly wound strings holding back Ventura's celebration with a force that unwound the coils; started a roar of hurrahs and horn honking that increased in intensity in a cacophony of sound that lasted well past 2:00 a.m. today."<sup>146</sup>

People on Main Street shook hands, hugged, kissed and danced. Citizens piled into cars and drove around the downtown honking their horns. Added to the happy Venturans were the Port Hueneme naval base workers, who had been given a two-day holiday. Most merchants closed up, but one butcher sold all his meat unmindful of ration coupons and at the Chinese Garden Restaurant, girls gave free drinks outside.<sup>147</sup> The long war was finally over!

## VIII - 1945-1960: CHANGING TIMES

Immediately after the end of the war, Ventura worried about her future. President Truman's pledge to bring the boys home by Christmas brought visions of unemployed veterans waiting in long lines, but the advent of a new depression never came. Instead, Ventura experienced a real estate boom similar to the one of 1885-1888. The building activity centered in Oxnard and Ventura where there was "great strides in industrial, commercial, and residential growth."<sup>150</sup> Oxnard's expansion was primarily in industrial plants--dehydrators, quick freeze, packaging and packing processing, and manufacturing. Ventura's growth was divided between homes and commercial buildings; the latter consisting for the most part of stores, restaurants, offices, small business houses and auto-related services.

Probably the number one concern for Venturans during 1946 was water. Plans for its control, storage, and wider distribution were being put into effect while the daily consumption increased by millions of gallons. Construction of a dam in Matillija Canyon got under way and plans for another on Coyote Creek were rushed through. Surveys and studies on the Santa Clara River watershed for conservation were made for future action. County population increases of 21,315 from the 1940 federal census of 69,655 boosted the average daily consumption of domestic water supplies. Increased industrial activity and intensified farming also placed a greater strain on water resources.

While building continued to advance, echoes of an earlier sentiment concerning a decline in oil production proved erroneous. By the end of 1947, Ventura County gave an oil thirsty world in excess of a million and a half more barrels of petroleum than in 1946. The 1947 total was approximately 25,898,330 barrels.<sup>152</sup> Oil production had increased steadily since the war, with new wells going down on continuously improving fields. This total was boosted by a steady string of explorations and development of areas long believed exhausted.

At the close of 1947 there were 77 new places of business in Ventura. The three major construction jobs, accounting for more than a million of the total \$3,578,653 building values for the County was: the \$600,000 Sears construction at Five Points; the \$254,000 reconversion of the sewage treatment plant; and the \$250,000 Jack Rose store. The construction of the Sears building at Five Points would herald in subdivision and commercial building in Ventura's east side, beginning the decline of the central business district in the late 50's and 60's.

By the early 50's, the postwar land boom, still in full swing, coupled with the productive oil fields brought prosperity to Ventura.

The Ventura Avenue field scored the most impressive production increase in any field in the world, starting the year at 56,000 barrels and ending at 72,900 barrels a day.<sup>154</sup> During 1951, sparked by the rapid development of Shell Oil Company's Taylor lease, Ventura Avenue was the scene of 64 new producers, bringing the total number of producing wells to 792. The number one taxpayer in Ventura was the Shell Oil Company, that represented 19.75% of the entire County assessed valuation. The number two taxpayer was the Tidewater Associated Oil Company.

Bank debits, which the Federal Reserve Board regards as the best index of the financial activity of a community, took a big upswing in the City of Ventura during 1951.<sup>155</sup>

While on one hand there were profits and prosperity, on the other the County's farmers suffered a marked decline from wartime demands. Lima beans, sugar beets, walnuts and citrus growers all were affected. Hardest hit in both crop and prices were the orange growers. The orange crop, belted by damaging winds, nipped by frosts and handicapped by lack of rainfall, was met by a poor market and falling

prices. In many instances growers let fruit drop to the ground rather than incur the cost of picking. Planting of new citrus tapered off throughout the County.<sup>156</sup> Removal of the walnut orchards increased to make room for the new subdivisions that were springing up all over the County.

Ventura County's economy boomed along with the nation's. In 1952 over \$17 million was added to the County's economy by the U.S. Naval Air Missile Test Center at Point Mugu. In Ventura City itself, the total building valuation in 1952 was \$3,415,954 as compared to 1951 with \$5,322,681, causing in some people worry that the real estate boom had finally ended. Yet, these fears proved to be wrong; by 1955 Ventura County's building valuations exceeded \$45,000,000. The land boom continued! New housing construction was reported to have exceeded that of eight states during the first six months of 1955.<sup>161</sup> A November "Monthly Summary", published by the Security First National Bank of Los Angeles, had reported that more permits and residences were issued in six months in Ventura County than in the states of South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Maine, Wyoming, Vermont or New Hampshire. Total valuations for the County as of December 22, 1955 was \$45,475,849 as compared to 1954's total of \$33,325,043.

For the City of Ventura it was a year of progress in almost all measurable ways--in area, population, business activity, schools and enrollments and construction. Yet, in the eyes of some City planners "it was a period of uneasy, uncontrollable growth."<sup>162</sup> In the closing months of the year, City planners united with the Planning Commission to emphasize to the City Council the need for a full-time planning consultant to establish direction for Ventura's growth in the future years.

During 1955, Ventura expanded its boundary lines to include 292 additional acres of land and 28.37 street miles. The City set a new record in building, issuing permits with a valuation of more than \$10,000,000 as compared to \$8,902,048 in 1954. Ventura issued permits



for 867 dwellings, an increase of 306 over the previous year, and 24 new stores (total valuation of \$1,137,515) and nine new schools (total valuation \$762,613) were built. In addition to the 292 acres annexed, an additional 60.36 acres was in the process of being annexed. Properties annexed in 1955 did little to eliminate the checkerboard pattern of Ventura's east end, resulting in the City Planner's decision to bring in larger areas in future annexations.

The City's population increased 1,605, bringing a total credited population of 21,268.

Throughout the fifties the pressures of increasing population played the biggest role in affecting actions of the Ventura County governing bodies. The old problems of water, drainage and roads remained. The new problems--zoning, sanitation, recreation and preparing the functions and personnel of County government to meet the needs of a County rapidly changing from an agricultural community to an urban culture became increasingly important.

Oil continued to be the giant of Ventura's wealth during the fifties, but it also continued to decline in both overall value and employment.

Loss of potential industry in the Ventura area came with the blocking of an area west of the City that would have allowed Crown Zellerbach to build a paper products plant. According to business leaders, this "helped block a chance for industry to meet the loss of oil employment and assessed valuation."<sup>174</sup> There were some industries under construction and in development during the close of the fifties. In Newbury Park, Packard Bell Technical Instruments, Inc. and Ross Duskin Electrical Company plants were under construction. Western Foods of California added a mushroom plant at Montalvo and Permanent Filter Company developed a plant at Oxnard. Companies that expanded during 1959 were: Raytheon at Point Mugu, Talley Manufacturing Company at Newbury Park, North American Atomics International at Santa Susana, and Kalof Pulp and Paper Corporation at Pt. Hueneme. William Kerrigan,

Manager of Ventura Economic Development Association said "the need for added industry both for assessed valuation and for employment is acute."<sup>175</sup>

Indirectly, the expansion brought on the decline of the central business district in the City of Ventura. The construction of large shopping center complexes, most notably Five Points built in 1947 and Buenaventura built in 1965 drew away shoppers from the older business sections. As early as 1963, planning consultants hired by the City proposed a large department store to be built in the central business district. "The economic studies conducted by the consultant indicates the need for a department store with a floor area of approximately 125,000 square feet."<sup>177</sup>

#### IX - 1960: PRESENT

Growth in Ventura was linked with prosperity up until the early '70's. In 1965 San Buenaventura first met its planning obligation by adopting a general plan. It envisioned complete development within the City and its planning area, projecting a population of 175,000 persons by 1990. In 1972, after three major amendments to the 1965 plan, new elements to the General Plan (Comprehensive Plan) were mandated by state law. These new elements, changing conditions and re-evaluation and modification of community values, goals, and objectives prompted the City Council to institute proceedings to develop a comprehensive plan to supercede the 1965 General Plan.

In 1969, the idea of combining Ventura's colorful history with today's advanced commercial concepts flowered into the Mission Plaza Project. The Mission became the focal point of the Mission Plaza Project. Thus, the City's history became the key to the City's redevelopment and rejuvenation.

APPENDIX I FOOTNOTES  
OF DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

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